

Your Family Finances

Special Needs And Siblings: Estate Planning

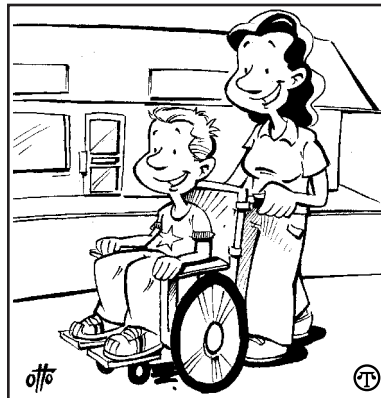
by David Harmon

(NAPSA)—Growing up with a sibling with special needs can be a wonderful opportunity for a child to learn and grow. Siblings are often involved with school issues and other daily activities for their special needs brothers and sisters. They often provide social, personal and emotional support. Sometimes, parents also arrange for the sibling to become primary caretaker, guardian or conservator after they've gone.

Frequently, parents fear their children with special needs will lose government benefits unless they are disinherited. The problem with leaving the money to the other siblings is that the asset, once part of the sibling's estate may eventually go to his or her heirs and can be attached through a divorce, lawsuit or bankruptcy. Moreover, if the sibling gives the person with special needs more than \$2,000, government benefits may be lost.

Fortunately, the way to avoid loss of benefits is to create a legal document known as a Special Needs Trust. Such a trust is maintained by a trustee on behalf of the person with special needs. The trustee manages the money in accordance with the trust document and state and federal guidelines. The money doesn't replace government benefits, only supplements them.

A sibling may be named trustee of the Special Needs Trust, though this should be carefully considered and discussed with the adult sibling. Sometimes parents name an



Adult siblings can care for their brothers and sisters with special needs without loss of government benefits if their parents plan properly in advance.

institution such as a bank or trust company to act as trustee or co-trustee, though this can be costly.

Special needs planning does not have to be done in isolation. It should involve the total coordination of all legal, personal and financial considerations affecting the entire family. Parents should feel they've met the needs of all their children.

For more information about this and other related topics call 1-877-MetDESK or visit the MetDesk Web site at www.metlife.com/desk.

Mr. Harmon is the MetDESK Manager, and a parent of a special needs child. MetDESK is a division of Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, New York, N.Y. 10010, that focuses on the financial concerns of families with special needs children.